Theresa Williams October 11, 2010

In “The Dimensions of Disability Oppression”, James Charlton contends that the dominant culture, through power, ideology, and socialization, oppresses and subjugates the disabled community, as well as other groups.

“…most analyses of why people with disabilities have been and continue to be poor, powerless, and degraded have been mired in an anachronistic academic tradition that understands the “status” of people with disabilities in terms of deviance and stigma.” (147). People with disabilities are assumed to be underprivileged because of the out of date beliefs that they are defective and deficient.

“ [Some] situate oppression in the realm of the ideas of others and not in systems or structures that marginalize people for political-economic and sociocultural reasons.” (148). People should define oppression as the governmental structures that disconnect people for social and political reasons.

“In political-economic terms, everyday life is informed by where and how individuals, families, and communities are incorporated into a world system dominated by the few who control the means of production and force.” (148). Peoples lives are defined by where they are “allowed” to function in a world controlled by the perceived dominant group.

“[Attitudes] hold that people with disabilities are pitiful and that disability itself is abnormal. This is one of the social norms used to separate people with disabilities through classification systems that encompass education, housing, transportation, health care, and family life.” (150). Certain social beliefs that disability is atypical and deviant create a partition between disabled people and “normal people” that include many aspects of life.

“…cultures are partial expressions of a world in which the dualities of domination/subordination, superiority/inferiority, normality/abnormality are relentlessly reinforced and legitimized.” (151). Culture continuously justifies the duplicity of power and subordination in the world.

“…backward attitudes about disability are not the basis for disability oppression, disability oppression is the basis for backwards attitudes.” (151). The subjugation of the disabled population is the cause of the erroneous beliefs about disability.

“ [Disabled people] cannot recognize that their self-perceived pitiful lives are simply a perverse mirroring of a pitiful world order.” (151). The disabled community is socialized into believing that their lives are worthless when in fact it is the pathetic world order that is useless.

“Special Education,…,has been transformed from a way to increase the probability that students with disabilities will get some kind of an education into a badge of inferiority and a rule-bound, bureaucratic process of separating and then warehousing millions of young people that the dominant culture has no need for.” (155). The dominant culture has turned special education classes into a way to detach the young disabled population from society and label them as mediocre.

“Instead of curing the social conditions that cause disease and desperation, or removing the steps that necessitate assistance, the dominant culture explains the pitiful conditions people are forced to live in by creating a stratum or group of “naturally” pitiful individuals to conceal its pitiful status quo.” (156). The dominant population alters reality by stating that disabled people and the way they live are naturally pathetic instead of admitting that the social policies are the cause of the struggles of disabled people.

“In the case of disability, domination is organized and reproduced principally by a circuitry of power and ideology that constantly amplifies the normality of domination and compresses difference into classification norms of superiority and normality against inferiority and abnormality.” (157). Disability is subjugated through the exaggeration of dominance and the duality of normal and abnormal.

Charlton, James. "The Dimensions of Disability Oppression." *The Disability Studies reader*. Lennard J. Davis. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.